

**SUMMARY OF THE
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
MAY 16, 2000**

The Proficiency Testing Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, May 16, 2000. The meeting was led by Mr. Matt Caruso of the New York State Department of Health, sitting in for the chair, Ms. Barbara Burmeister. *The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss the PT fields of testing and acceptance criteria, Accrediting Authority (AA) Group issues, and other comments received recently by the committee.*

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Burmeister was unable to attend today's meeting, however she provided the committee with some updates and discussion topics for the meeting agenda. This information is discussed as it relates to topics below.

Mr. Caruso reviewed the minutes from the meeting on May 2, 2000. The committee agreed that the minutes are final. The status of the Action Items is as follows:

- C Ms. Burmeister e-mailed Appendix H to the PT Committee.
- C Ms. Burmeister inserted "or multimodal" to the new sentence in Appendix C.4.
- C Mr. Larry Jackson will research data related to preparation methods and pass/fail rates for solid matrix analytes. (Mr. Jackson was not available to provide an update on the subject.)
- C Ms. Burmeister will e-mail Mr. Jackson with requested changes to the PT Process flowchart and then include the flowchart in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). (No update was available.)
- C Ms. Burmeister revised FAQ numbers 9 and 10. Number 11 will not be included in the current FAQs, or "on hold" until a resolution is reached about fields of accreditation and multiple matrices.
- C Ms. Burmeister attended the Accrediting Authorities meeting on 5/2/00 and responded to issues on behalf of the PT Committee.
- C Mr. Matt Caruso drafted a historical perspective on the development of the PT acceptance criteria.
- C Mr. Chuck Wibby has not yet completed the errata sheet or procedures document for adding new analytes to the Fields of Testing list.
- C Ms. Burmeister is in discussion with the NELAC Chair to fill the open committee position left by Ms. Michelle Kropilak.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Ms. Burmeister informed the committee that the Program Policy and Structure Committee (Chapter 1) will not propose any changes to the scope of accreditation at this time. She said that the committee needed to provide guidance for Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)—water versus RCRA—solid PT requirements. Ms. Burmeister asked for a volunteer from the committee to re-draft FAQ#11 and e-mail it to her as soon as possible. The FAQs are due to Ms. Lisa Doucet by May 19, 2000 in order to be included in the participant material for NELAC VI.

While the answer to FAQ 11 was technically correct, because “matrix” is not included in the NELAC definition of an FOT, keeping the FAQ contributes to the confusion. Without "matrix," recognition of a primary AA's accreditation for RCRA would be difficult. One suggestion (to try to keep the FAQ) was to remove the words “non-potable water.” This was considered, however, the committee decided that keeping the FAQ contributed to the confusion more than it helped. Therefore, as in the previous teleconference, the committee decided to leave # 11 out of the FAQs.

PT FIELDS OF TESTING (FOT) AND ACCEPTANCE CRITERIA UPDATE

Because the Chapter 1 committee will not propose any changes to the scope of accreditation at this time, Ms. Burmeister said that the PT committee will be proposing their “option 2.” That is, the committee will propose adding “method” to the PT FOT, but delete “matrix” so that the field of accreditation and the PT FOT are consistent. In addition, the committee will propose to add language that states “PT sample matrix shall be appropriate for the intended use of the method.”

NELAP AA GROUP ISSUES

Ms. Burmeister informed the committee that the NELAC Board of Directors has extended the period for the laboratories to become NELAP accredited. The accredited laboratories will be announced January 2001 instead of July 2000. A memorandum from Dr. James Pearson about this decision is posted on the NELAC website.

COMMENTS RECEIVED

Comments by Mr. Tom Coyner in his letter dated April 28, 2000, will be discussed in the Accrediting Authority Group meeting later today. Ms. Rae Anne Haynes and Mr. Matt Caruso will try to respond to these comments on behalf of the PT Committee.

Comment was received from Dr. Wilson Hershey about PT studies required by non-NELAC governmental bodies. He was concerned that a strict reading of Section 2.7.3 (supplemental studies) could lead to the conclusion that these PT results must be considered as additional NELAC PT samples. He suggested the following sentence be added to Section 2.73. “Separate PT studies required by non-NELAC governmental bodies or private clients do not need to be counted as additional studies.” A member of the PT Committee responded that the study results should go to the laboratory and its accrediting agency, not to NELAC. Mr. Caruso said that he would write a response

to Dr. Hershey.

Another comment was received from Ms. Aurora Shields. She pointed out an error in the list of NELAC PT fields of testing (February, 2000 version). The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), standard plate count has an acceptance criteria of 2 standard deviations (or 2 SD). She said that this does not agree with the NELAC standards, Section E.3.2, which requires 99% confidence limits (3 SD). She said that they also discovered that a couple of PT providers have been using the wrong acceptance criteria, and asked the committee to correct the FOT list posted on the NELAC webpage. Mr. Matt Caruso will respond to Ms. Shields comments, and the committee will address the problem.

Mr. Caruso raised the issue about negative acceptance limits. Mr. Caruso said that there are 3 or 4 linear regression equations which produce negative numbers as the lower acceptance limits. It is mathematically impossible to produce anything but negative numbers for these analytes. It was suggested that the PT Committee follow the same route as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) on this issue. If the acceptance limit derived by linear regression is negative, then the lower detection limit will be used as the acceptance limit. Mr. Wibby said that he will add an explanation to the errata sheet for this.

Ms. Jane Jensen submitted comments about the PT acceptance criteria for the additional analytes (not covered by National Institute of Standards and Technology [NIST] accreditation). She was concerned about the acceptance criteria generated from participant data. She said that the chances for participant data to be biased are high because laboratories may take short cuts in methods. She said that if the acceptance criteria were based on reference laboratory data (e.g., Federal EPA and/or state laboratory data), then there would be more confidence in the use of such criteria because these laboratories are more likely to use the methods correctly and are impartial. She also commented that the use of participant data for establishment of acceptance criteria defeats the purpose of determining poorly performing laboratories, since laboratories will be compared among themselves. There would be no point of reliable reference.

The committee responded to Ms. Jensen's comments, saying that the acceptance limits derived from participant data were compared to NIST/National Voluntary Laboratory Accreditation Program (NVLAP) acceptance limits. The committee found good agreement between the two and felt comfortable extending the methodology to the additional analytes not covered by NIST accreditation. Mr. Wibby said that he would draft a response to Ms. Jensen.

Mr. Wibby will also draft language for Appendix C to permit a minimum number of analytes to be present in a PT sample (for the additional analytes not in the NIST approved fields of testing) and will add a footnote to the errata sheet.

Mr. Steve Getz submitted a question on multi-analyte PT audit samples. He said that during an onsite audit, the auditors stated that on multi-analyte methods, such as VOCs (volatile organic compounds) or semi-volatiles, 100% of all compounds in the PE sample must be successfully analyzed rather than the previous criteria of 85% passing. He said that if an analyte was missed, the laboratory would not be certified for that compound, but would be certified for the method. He asked whether this

interpretation was correct. The committee responded that the interpretation is partially correct. Under NELAC Chapter 1, the scope of accreditation is program-method-analyte, so no laboratory can be accredited for a method alone. It has to be a program-method-analyte combination. If an analyte is missed, the laboratory would not be accredited for that method-analyte combination but could be accredited for other analytes using that method. Mr. Caruso volunteered to respond to Mr. Getz's question.

UPDATE ON NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Two people have been nominated by the committee and their names were given to Dr. Jim Pearson for approval. Ms. Burmeister e-mailed Dr. Pearson asking for an extension for nominating the voting member who will replace Ms. Michele Kropilak.

USEPA/NIST ITEMS

Mr. Ed Glick from USEPA, Office of Water, shared some concerns he recently gathered from the states in Regions 7 and 8. He said that they are concerned with the lack of uniformity with the report forms the providers are using and that forms are being sent out incomplete. He said that there is a good deal of information missing from the forms. The committee said that although NIST has set guidelines for electronic deliverables, the hardcopy reports vary by provider. In addition, there are two different reports being generated by providers: one for the laboratory and the other for the primary AA. The report formats required by the states is not uniform. The committee decided that this would be incorporated into the letter to NIST currently being drafted (concerning oversight of the PT program).

MISCELLANEOUS

The PT Committee's agenda for NELAC VI (approved by the committee on May 2, 2000) was submitted by Ms. Burmeister to Ms. Lisa Doucet on May 12, 2000. Ms. Cindy Nettrour reported no updates for the Membership and Outreach Committee.

ACTION ITEMS
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
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| Item No. | Action | Date to be Completed |
|-----------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. | Mr. Matt Caruso will respond to comments from Mr. Wilson Hershey. | DONE |
| 2. | Ms. Rae Anne Haynes and Mr. Caruso will respond to comments from Mr. Tom Coyner at the Accrediting Authorities Group meeting (letter dated 4/28/00). | DONE |
| 3. | Mr. Chuck Wibby will add an explanation to the errata sheet about determination of lower acceptance limits when negative numbers are derived from the linear regression equations. | |
| 4. | Mr. Chuck Wibby will draft a letter to NIST about oversight of the PT program. | |
| 5. | Mr. Chuck Wibby will respond to comments from Ms. Jane Jensen. | |
| 6. | Mr. Matt Caruso will respond to comments from Mr. Steve Getz's. | DONE |
| 7. | Mr. Chuck Wibby will draft language for Appendix C to permit a minimum number of analytes to be present in a PT sample (for the additional analytes not in the NIST approved fields of testing) and add a footnote to the errata sheet. | |

PARTICIPANTS
PARTICIPANTS PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
MAY 16, 2000

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